
The book is divided into four parts preceded by an introduction that highlights the differences between western medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The first part entitled “The myth and truth about Chinese medicine” comprises two chapters which cover the fundamentals of Chinese medicine and the development of Ben Cao and herbal recipes. Part II covers the practicalities of Chinese herbal remedies. This part is divided into two chapters. Chapter 3 illustrates processing, storage, dosage and usage. Chapter 4 covers herbal recipes, their modification, quality control and patent medicine.

Part III entitled “The healing powers of medicinal herbs, past and present” emphasizes the clinical application of the most commonly prescribed individual herbs. It is divided into eleven chapters. Each chapter covers plant species used for the treatment of a specific ailment. These include pain, cerebral and coronary heart diseases, tranquilizers, common colds, allergies and headaches, expectorants, antitussives and anti-asthmatics (pinellia), pain killers, gastrointestinal ailments (Agastache), urinary tract disorders, antipyretics, antimicrobial, detoxicants and natural antitumors. In total, 138 medicinal herbs belonging to 61 plant families were covered. Information on the plant species, family, distribution and part used are included as well as medicinal properties of the plant such as taste, site of action, effects, medicinal uses, dosage, precautions, side effects, toxicity, chemical constituents, pharmacological and clinical findings.

The last part of the book, Part IV, covers similar topics as Part III. Here recipes for traditional combinations of plant material of different species for different actions are presented. The appendices provide helpful and valuable information and include a list of commonly used Chinese herbal remedies, a list of popular herbal recipes, a glossary of general medical and pharmaceutical terminology and a comprehensive bibliography for further reading.

It is certainly challenging to review all aspects of such a unique medical system. However, comprehensive information on clinical findings about the efficacy and safety of some of the plant species reviewed is lacking. In addition, it would also be interesting to know the availability of these plants as the high demand on Chinese Traditional Medicine throughout history could have endangered their conservation status.

The book offers valuable information about the historic development and evolution of Chinese Materia Medica (Ben Cao). It also explains the basics of Traditional Chinese Medicine which incorporates philosophy and religion such as Tao, Yin and Yang and the doctrine of the five elements. The book provides useful information to lay people who are interested in Chinese herbal remedies. The book certainly will be of interest to students and professionals in the area of medicinal plants as a guide for screening plant species and genera closely related to those used in Traditional Chinese Medicine for the treatment of similar ailments and diseases.

E.E. Elgorashi
Research Centre for Plant Growth and Development, School of Biological and Conservation Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg, Private Bag X01, Scottsville 3209, South Africa
E-mail address: elgorashi@ukzn.ac.za.

doi:10.1016/j.sajb.2008.01.004


In this day and age where there is increasing belief and emphasis that molecular biology will explain all aspects of plant development, it is refreshing to see this book appear on book shelves. This book is written by one of a few remaining classic plant scientists who spent his whole life in wonderment at the minute detail and interaction of plant processes to deliver the amazing biodiversity and infinite detail we have in plant structure. Not only within the Plant Kingdom as a whole, but within a single plant specifically. Esra Galun drew from both the historical background and modern methodologies in Botany and Chemistry to deliberate different levels of plant complexities, from single cells, tissues, organs and the whole plant.

There are few that are currently able to put together a book of this quality on Plant Patterning. The contents cover many aspects, it is well illustrated and provides excellent integration